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Jerry Seay
College of Charleston

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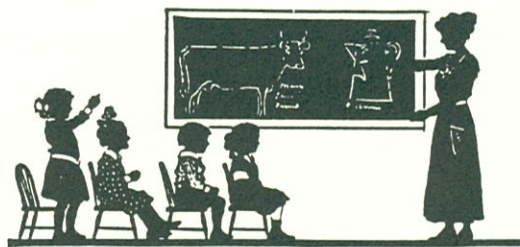
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You Gotta Go to School for That?

by **Jerry Seay** (Rookie Librarian,
College of Charleston Libraries)



Just the other day I was getting a taco at the College Food Court (I like places that make eating sound like a full contact sport.) Now this in itself is not an amazing occurrence (unless you count the fact that I had already had four that day and it was still breakfast). Then this student behind me said, "Hey, don't you work at the library?"

Being a proud member of the College of Charleston Imperial Library Reference staff who just happened to be buying a taco for breakfast I answered with swaggering self assurance, "Why yes I am."

"Yea, I thought that was you," he continued. "Ya know I took library 101 last semester and I never could get the hang of it."

"Really?" I paid for my taco.

This guy got a sort of hesitant look on his face. I was waiting for the question that begins: "oh great librarian how long have I struggled with this question . . ." Instead he said, "Do you librarians have to go to many training classes before they let you be librarians?"

I gripped my steaming taco. Of course I wanted to say, "Golly, no, my young friend. They just go out onto the street and pick the first ten people who walk by with sensible shoes and decent hair bun potential."

But I did not. "Believe it or not," said I, "library knowledge is not an innate talent. I actually had to go to graduate school and get a MASTERS DEGREE for this job." I waved my taco about for effect. It seemed to help.

He looked duly surprised and impressed. "Really? You can go to school for that? (I swear he really said it.) A *Masters Degree in library*? Go figure." He shook his head in wonder.

"Difficult to fathom I know." I left him to ponder how he was going to pay for his breakfast on his measly non-librarian salary.

As I let my taco fill my minimum daily requirements, I thought on this encounter. The problem as I see it is image. Now you publisher types out there do not have this problem. Mention the word "publisher" and we all get a clear image of what you folks do — standing at printing presses all day with suits on and phones glued to your ears just talking to famous people and publishing to beat the

band. How much clearer can you get?

And you vendors out there vending your hearts out. Your image is clear. Everybody knows that vending requires you to wear nice suits and carry full color brochures in leather briefcases around all day wheeling and dealing and, no doubt, frequenting vending machines.

But mention the word "librarian" and weird images of hair buns and glasses with chains hooked to them and little old ladies in tennis shoes who can't stand noise except when they stamp out books with a clap of thunder and signs that say *don't eat, drink, talk or breath in the library under penalty of death* and rows and rows of old books. Not a sexy image that.

So, what we have to do of course is change the name "librarian" and "library". Just think how the world would change and how my encounter would have been different.....

INFORMATION PROFESSIONAL (Standing in line to buy nutritious taco for breakfast): Just put that on my tab please.

CLERK: Why yes sir, mister Info Man, sir. Anything for a staff member of the Campus Media / Information / Resource / Can't even function Without Us So Don't Even Try Center.

STUDENT: (Awed to be in the presence of an information professional):

Excuse me, sir? Aren't you a....

I. P.: Why yes, son, I am a highly trained information professional...an "infomaniac" if you will.

STUDENT: Golly, mister Infomaniac, that's a nice suit. I bet you have many high level degrees. How do you hold all that knowledge? And what do you do with all that money that you make?

I. P.: Well, son, as you know, infomaniacs are an elite group of highly trained and skilled information manipulators. You might say we just know what buttons to push."

STUDENT: Golly.

I. P.: As for your other question. We try not to let the massive amount of money that people pay us for what we do get in the way of the simple things in life....like a fine taco. It's what we do. You'll have to excuse me, please. I have to catch a plane for Washington to attend the swearing in of the President's new cabinet position."

STUDENT: The Secretary of Information?

I. P.: Yes. She's one of our own. And besides there is sure to be lots of free food at the reception.

STUDENT: Wow. You mean the kind with toothpicks sticking in it?

I. P.: Precisely! ☞

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